

KL, Tokyo — true friends in many fields

Bt 2 - JAN 2001

DIPLOMATICALLY WRITING

Japan and Malaysia have been enjoying very good and close relations in international politics, economy, education and culture

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I WOULD like to thank the Business Times of Malaysia for giving me once again the opportunity to deliver my message on the ties between Japan and Malaysia to the distinguished readers on the occasion of the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

His Majesty Emperor Akihito was born in Tokyo on December 23 1933 as the first son of then Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako. In April 1959, then Crown Prince Akihito married Michiko Shoda (now Her Majesty Empress Michiko). His Majesty Akihito ascended to the throne as the 125th Emperor of Japan on January 7 1989 upon the demise of Emperor Hirohito. The Emperor is the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people of Japan.

Japan and Malaysia have been enjoying very good and close relations as true friends in many fields such as international politics, economy, education and culture.

I am very pleased to note that this year, we have witnessed active interaction between the leaders of both countries.

The Honourable Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi visited Japan in June and September respectively.

Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Hitachi paid an official visit to Malaysia in September.

In November, a summit meeting between Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and Dr Mahathir, which highlighted our friendly and cooperative relations, was held in conjunction with the Asean+3 Summit Meeting in Singapore.

The people-to-people exchanges of our two countries have been carried out at all levels. The Government of Malaysia launched the Look East Policy in 1981 and the Government of Japan has been assisting to implement it.

The number of students and trainees who have studied in Japan under the Look East Policy now exceeds 6,000. Those students and trainees are emerging as core engines of economic development of Malaysia and also as catalysts of cooperation between Malaysia and Japan.

With respect to cultural exchanges, through the Japan Festival, which has been held every year in Malaysia, both peoples have deepened the understanding of the cultures of each other.

During the festival, a lot of Japanese and Malaysian people participate and enjoy together in many events including the Bon Odori Dance which gets a participation of about 40,000 people every time, and all kinds of cultural programmes which offer opportunities of fruitful exchanges among the people. There is no doubt that these personal interactions have significantly enhanced our friendship.

As for the respective economies, I observe the signs of recovery and positive

growth on both ends of the Pacific shores. Under the "Rebirth of Japan's economy", the Japanese economy has started to show gradual but positive signs of recovery.

Japan will continue to exert all efforts to promote information technology (IT) related industries to ensure its economic growth and bring its economy up to the next stage to face new challenges.

The Malaysian economy has been recovering at an even stronger and steadier pace due to various effective measures taken by its Government.

We now feel that the business is definitely on the track of a comeback with a lot of suspended construction works in Kuala Lumpur such as buildings and monorails now resumed or even completed.

I sincerely hope that Malaysia will achieve further economic development by positive industrial policy centering on the promotion of IT related industries and that Japan and Malaysia will cooperate with each other in this field in the next century.

Further, Malaysia and Japan have stepped up their cooperation to help other countries. Malaysia is well known for its active role in South-South cooperation.

Malaysia has offered herself to be a launching stage of new programmes and initiatives to help African countries under the TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) process in cooperation with Japan.

I am very proud that our partnership has embarked on a course of making a global significance beyond our own boundaries.

I would like to thank the people of both Malaysia and Japan who have dedicated themselves to enhancing our friendly relations. I would like to extend my best wishes for the further promotion of our

friendship and partnership as well as for the happiness and prosperity of the peoples of both countries.

Finally, I wish all of you a very happy New Year and to all the Muslims "Selamat Hari Raya".